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Branding local heritage and popularising a remote past: The example of Haugesund in Western Norway

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Abstract

Since the national romantic era, the Haugesund region of Norway has been associated with patriotism and heroism as it is believed to be the homeland of the Viking hero Harald Fairhair, the first king of Norway. In the arrival hall at the airport outside Haugesund the passengers are today faced with the following words: "Welcome to the Homeland of the Viking Kings". The slogan refers to official regional attraction strategies based on a late modern Viking enthusiasm, used in efforts to increase local identity, to enchant a visitor market and to brand the region, in short, to create pride and glory. In this paper, dynamics of heritage production at Haugesund are examined by emphasising how a popular and commercial past ("the experience society") mediates public debates and conflicts, thus questioning the function experts within the field of archaeology and the cultural heritage management have in local communities.

Keywords

Heritage Values, National Monuments, Popularisation, Viking Kings, Norway

Introduction

One of the main topics addressed at the session *Decentering the Discipline? Archaeology and Extra-Archaeological Communities* at the British TAG in 2012 was public uses of the past and how various communities construct 'their' heritage. In this article, I explore what 'extra-archaeological community' means with regard to public interpretations and uses of archaeological sites. The phrase 'extra' has connotations of something that is second to, an extension to or something as opposed to professional archaeology. This brings to mind the distinction between authorised and unauthorised heritage

discourses and the critique that heritage studies tend to focus on the dominant, official or state discourses whereas competing counter-discourses, the everyday or 'popular' discourses, tend to be overlooked (Smith 2006). It could be argued that the heritage literature pays too much attention to the formative processes of professional culture versus community culture, and is less concerned about agency (Dessingué 2010). A discursive distinction between the archaeological profession and the community could be too simple if it does not take into account the dynamic heritagisation processes at work in local societies. I will approach this topic by emphasising how academic knowledge and practices as well as popular interpretations of a remote past become resources for commercial and political rhetorics about the past and are intervened by how local societies ascribe heritage values.

Studies of collective memories or 'roots' associated with a remote past, and more specifically with heroic myths, is a topic in memory studies that intervenes with studies of public archaeology (Holtorf 2005: 3–5). Remote heroes (kings, commanders) and events described in the Norse sagas are vital elements in modern and late modern rhetorics of the past. In this article, the memorial tradition of the Norwegian national father figure King Harald Fairhair becomes a focal point in examining heritage practices. The Norse story of the Viking King Harald Fairhair is associated with various archaeological sites where national monuments are erected and commemorations are performed. The grand discussion about national monuments and commemorations however has been how a remote past with glorious ancestors represents ethno-nationalist ideologies (e.g. Gillis 1994; Nora 1998 [1992]; Shnirelman 2003; Spillman 1997). This article takes another approach by examining local initiatives and motives of using a heroic past in local development strategies and ownership of the past. While the discussion of a remote heroic past has been centered on ethnicity, less attention is paid to the intimate relationship between political uses and the cultural production derived from a popularised and commercialised past. The celebrations of a Viking heritage at the town of Haugesund in western Norway will serve as a specific case study for examining these local heritagisation processes at work in a local context.

National monuments at archaeological sites for constructing symbolic images

Myths and legends about ancient peoples (Gauls, Saxons, Vikings, Highlanders, etc.) and heroes (kings, commanders, etc.) are deep-rooted encounters for the cultural production of homeland myths, historic narratives and symbolic places or landscapes associated with 'the memory of the Nation' (Finlay 1997; Kristiansen 1993; Pomian 1996 [1992]; Thiesse 2010). During the nationalist movements in the nineteenth century, interfaces of nation and memory were evident in how monuments at historic places such as the Vercingétorix memorial in Alesia (erected in 1865 by Napoleon III) and the Hermann memorial in Detmold (Hermannsdenkmal, erected in 1875 by Kaiser Wilhelm I) brought together symbolic elements of the native landscape with its mythic history (Holtorf and Williams 2006: 243–245; Schama 1996: 109–118). Similar symbolic monuments were erected in the Scandinavian countries. In nineteenth century Scandinavia, efforts of strengthening national identity by using heroic Viking rhetorics were particularly evident in periods of war and national injuries, for instance by the Swedes when they lost Finland to Russia in 1809 (Ustvedt 2004: 253) and by the Danes when they lost Schleswig-Holstein to the Germans in 1864 (Kristiansen 1993: 20–23; van der Schriek and van der Schriek 2011).

In Norway, a similar monument tradition occurred as the result of the struggle for national independence during the nineteenth century. A useful narrative character for legitimating this struggle was King Harald Fairhair, one of the most celebrated heroes derived from the Icelandic medieval saga *Heimskringla* (the Kings' Sagas) written by Snorri Sturluson (1178/79–1241). In Norwegian commemoration practices, King Harald the First, alias Harald Fairhair, is a heroic narrative character disseminating a foundation story of Norway becoming an independent nation. Several archaeological sites associated with King Harald Fairhair have been used in commemorations celebrating the nation, from the nineteenth century, which culminated in the constitution of the national assembly in 1814 and the reestablishment of the Norwegian crown in 1905, to the present day. King Harald Fairhair is, as the name indicates, a poetic expression of a heroic Viking

character that pertains to modern myth constructions. On the basis of this commemorative tradition, a national monument devoted to Harald Fairhair was erected in 1872 at a prehistoric grave mound site in the outskirts of Haugesund, a town situated at the Atlantic shore within the western Norwegian county of Rogaland (Figure 1).

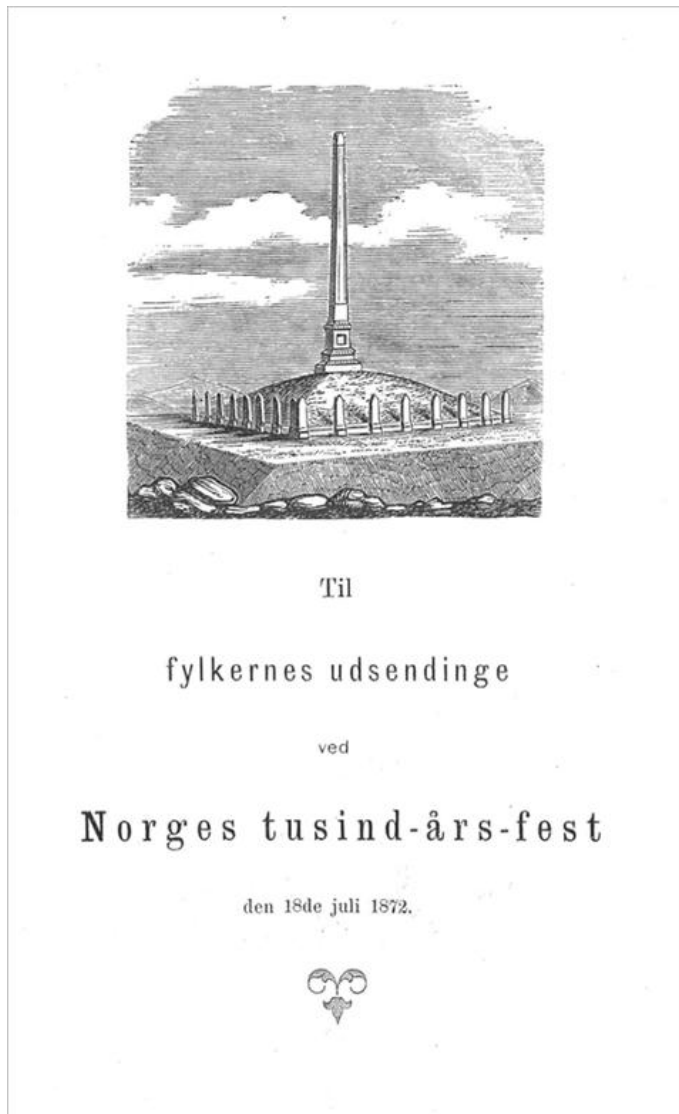


Figure 1. From the cover of the invitation to the thousand year anniversary (Source: original program for Festlighederne ved Afsløringen af Mindesmærket den 18 de Juli 1872. Haugesund, 1872).

Haugesund had all the 'ingredients' for the making of a heroic past. The region had several large ancient grave mounds and is mentioned in the King's Saga as the area where Harald Fairhair lived and died. Even the place name 'Haugesund' ('The Strait of Mounds') tickled the imagination for those living in and visiting the area about the greatness of the past that could be hidden in the soil. On the basis of interpretations of the King's Saga, historians and archaeologists of the late nineteenth century believed that Harald Fairhair was buried in a grave mound at the farm Gardå in the vicinity of Haugesund. This interpretation was, however, uttered already in the 1680s by the historian Thormod Torfæus (1636–1719) who lived in the area, and the idea of Gardå as 'a site of Kings' Mounds' was well-known local knowledge during the eighteenth and the nineteenth century. The romantic image of 'Harald's Mound' in poems and visual art had vital importance for the construction of Haugesund as a heritage place associated with Harald Fairhair. The term 'Haugalandet' ('the Land of Mounds') was originally an expression used in a national romantic poem called *Harald's Mound* (Haraldshaugen) written by Ivar Aasen (1813–1896) in 1852, where the poetic imagination of 'Haugalandet' expressed the characteristic landscape around the royal mound at Gardå (Østensjø 1958: 289). The poetic imagination of 'Haugalandet' was part of a national political program where the primary goal was to gain acknowledgement of the value of Norwegian language and culture. The idea was that by carving out a powerful poetic expression of an ancestral landscape, the character of a real and independent nation would become visualised and legitimised. The landscape image of Harald's Mound fitted well with the romantic idea of Haugesund as 'the Land of Kings', thereby as a symbolic memorial site of the nation.

The academic-poetic discourse of 'Harald's Mound' in the late nineteenth century paved the way for the construction of a memorial monument on the ancient site. The Harald monument at Haugesund was erected in connection with the millennium jubilee that took place on the 18th of July 1872. The jubilee was celebrated all around Norway, not at least in the capital Christiania (today Oslo) where a romantic statue of Harald Fairhair was temporarily erected in front of the Parliament Building. The theme of the jubilee was the battle of Hafrsfjord, which apparently happened in 872

AD, when King Harald Fairhair managed to establish a nationwide kingdom by military force. The symbolic elements of the monument were federation and unity, whereas a circle of stones symbolising the old Norse counties called 'fylker' enclosed a huge obelisk that symbolised Harald's achievement and thereby the paternal foundation of Norway. Although Norway at this time was in a political union with Sweden, the leading motive of the jubilee was parliamentary ideas which gave the centralised administration in Christiania the opportunity to promote a connection between the newly established Norwegian national assembly (established in 1814) and a nationwide periphery.

The transformation of the archaeological site outside Haugesund into a memorial site of the nation was created on the basis of academic knowledge that served a poetic imagination of the place, which in turn created a symbolic image that could be consumed by the public. The symbolic image defined a cultural capital, a cultural resource, of which the local community in Haugesund was very well aware of the benefits.

Romanticism and local patriotism becomes a commodity

The very idea behind the construction of a Harald memorial and the arrangement of the millennium celebration held in 1872 was launched in 1863 by the Haugesund patriot, ship owner, local politician and businessman Ludolf Johan Kramer Antonius Eide (1821–1908) who managed to create enthusiasm for the project among his fellow citizens in Haugesund (Østensjø 1958). The initiators of the jubilee were commercial entrepreneurs in the city of Haugesund who believed that such an event would create prosperity and wealth for the city and its hinterland. The national motive for the jubilee was in other words a secondary motivational factor for these local entrepreneurs.

The commercial uses of King Harald Fairhair were evident at the celebration day in 1872 which gave Haugesund both national and international attention. At the celebration day, the 4,000 inhabitants of Haugesund hosted about 20,000 visitors that gave the commercial community a great income. Visitors could buy, for example, 'Harald-

cigars', stoneware with engravings of the Harald monument, and Harald amulets (Østensjø 1958: 297, 303–304). Commercial uses of the past were, in other words, the main motivation for the local community, and here national politics became instrumental tools for gaining attention and to attract a visitor and buyer market. The local patriotic goal was to put Haugesund on the world map. As such, the idea of the past as commodity was a vital driving force for a local memorial practice based on King Harald Fairhair. In the 1870s, Haugesund was a new 'Klondike-town' that had grown out of the boom caused by lucrative fishery exports, among others to England. Harald Fairhair could as a brand promote their position in the market. This is also evident during the twentieth century where the Viking hero Harald Fairhair was branded in several ways: as slogans for sardines, milk, soda pops, and other products (Figure 2). The positive character associated with Harald Fairhair—representing braveness, strength, healthy climate, etc. —defined a vast consumer culture.



Figure 2. Harald Fairhair used as advertising for sardines from Haugesund (after Bjørnson 2004: 196).

During the twentieth century the commemoration practice at Haugesund had created a symbolic image on the basis of Harald Fairhair which was used as a branded icon. During the process, the Harald monument was enrolled as part of this branded icon. As recently expressed by the mayor of Haugesund, the so-called 'Harald silhouette' is a significant regional trademark.

The Harald's Mound has become a symbol of Haugesund, and 'the Harald silhouette' has become a trademark for the town. [...] For Haugesund it [the Harald monument] also symbolises something important in our own local history: The struggle to be seen and respected in a perpetual competition with larger and older neighbouring cities in the north and south [...] Our 'father of the town' Ludolf Eide, who more than any other early understood how important it was to build a cultural town in the Haugesund, had already in 1863 conceived the idea of a national monument on the Harald's Mound [...] As we approach the festival month of August, we feel confident that Ludolf Eide's assessment is more appropriate than ever. [...] The festival contributes to the comfort and cohesion locally. The festival has become a part of our Haugesundian identity (Steen, Jr. 2008, author's translation).

The so-called 'Harald silhouette' is a regional trademark depicting a common identity and prosperity for people sharing a promised land visualised with a landscape at sunrise. In addition, the monument has become an icon symbolising people and enterprises located in the Haugesund-region called 'Haugalandet', the Land of Mounds. The 'Harald silhouette' is today an image with iconic status which is used by local associations and arrangements for a variety of purposes. In sum, the iconic image of the Harald monument has become a heritage in its own right, and among other things, expressed as a motive on the Haugesund folk costume which was designed in 2001 (Oddenes 2001). The 'Harald silhouette' constitutes a vital symbol for the region as a whole, where the idea of the region is associated with enterprises within a commercial region.

In the arrival hall at Karmøy airport outside Haugesund the passengers are today greeted with the words, "Welcome to the

Homeland of the Viking Kings”, and as expressed in similar terms at the website *Visit Haugesund* (Visit Haugesund 2013), the land ‘Haugalandet’ has become synonymous with a commercial region with numerous tourist attractions. The modern myth of Harald Fairhair constitutes a central part in this regional imagery (Figure 3). The regional image of ‘Haugalandet’, the Land of Mounds, is first and almost defined by a heritage where a homeland myth based on Harald Fairhair—the land of Kings—is synonymous with a Viking heritage. In a Norwegian context, other Viking regions compete in being similar commercialised regions. It is a regional romanticism that applies to late modern experience society within the scope of the heritage industry and which is based on popular uses of the Viking concept in general and Harald Fairhair in particular.



Figure 3. The ‘Harald silhouette’ on the website *Visit Haugesund* (<http://www.visithaugesund.no>).

The strong, brave and resolute character of Harald Fairhair disseminates a 'good story' which is embraced by popular culture, and as an expression of populism the heroic story has gained positive connotations in commercial and political rhetorics as well. Today, King Harald Fairhair is associated with several archaeological sites where modern monuments and theme parks (obelisks, towers, sculptures, 'reconstructions' of ancient houses/villages) are constructed and where various commemorative practices (jubilees, rallies, festivals) are being performed. The Viking hero Harald Fairhair has become part of a vital re-enactment culture, which is evident in, among other things, a memorial park in central Haugesund with the erection of a statue of Harald Fairhair (Johannessen 2012), the performance of a Harald musical (Amble 2001), the building of 'the largest' Viking ship in the world (Vikingkings 2013), the establishment of a theme park based on the Viking concept, and a historic centre where the mythology of King Harald is disseminated (Vikinggarden 2013). The main initiators behind these commemorative projects in the Haugesund region today are, as it was in the 1870s, local commercial entrepreneurs who are nourished by local patriotism. The local community in this context comprises educated, economic and politically powerful local elites who appeal to fellow townsmen, their own. These actors are very well aware of the potential of using 'their' heritage as a prosperous resource for economic growth and community development. Archaeologists have in different ways approached this local enthusiasm.

Archaeological research communities in clashes

At present, a large archaeological research excavation has started at Avaldsnes, the ancient Kings Farm just outside Haugesund (Kulturhistorisk Museum 2013). The excavations could gain knowledge that can be discussed against the written medieval sources, as well as gaining knowledge on the multiple and long term uses of the area. However, the project has been criticised for being in control of local commercial interests which forward a stereotypical popular image of the past whereas their main goal for financing the project is to find the remnants of King Harald, which would be sensational and would apply to a lucrative consumer market. In this public discussion, journalists (Gundersen

2010; Hadland 2007) as well as archaeologists (Christophersen 2011; Skre 2011) have been participating. The debate has also provoked a fierce debate between archaeologists who support private funding and the proponents of state funded cultural heritage management. The private investors have attacked the heritage management sector arguing that they excavate on the basis of a rigid management practice, thus neglecting public interests. The local investors argue that people are not interested in cooking pits; they want an archaeology that is sensational and which can generate economic income for the region. Their opponents ask on the other hand the rhetorical question: What kind of archaeology and cultural heritage will future generations get if these practices are exclusively governed by commercial interests?

The government-owned regional museum institution at Haugesund has in accordance with this critical approach addressed the potential of using the Harald monument and the forthcoming national jubilee in 2014 as an educational tool for debating patriotism and social inclusion. They argue that the local public uses of the past is favouring and promoting a romantic memory culture which excludes social groups and thereby mismatches a national program based on multiculturalism. According to their newly established Facebook campaign (Norges riksmonument mot 2014 2010), the museum argues for a replacement of regional romanticism with a subaltern theme by disseminating how non-nationalist ideas and minority groups have been excluded in the dominant romantic memorial tradition associated with King Harald Fairhair. In this context, the local museum represents a critical voice, a counter discourse, to the romantic, favourable attitudes to cultural heritage that characterises the local uses of the past in Haugesund and which many archaeologists also favour. As such, the museum acts as a minority that struggles to be heard in the dominant locally-based romantic patriotic heritage discourse. It is tempting to ask who the 'extra-archaeological community' is in this context. The museum institution seems to be the 'extra' or 'added' component viewed against the dominant romantic patriotic discourse within the community of Haugesund. The archaeological society seems very much divided in how to approach the romantic patriotic approach that is so significant in the local society of Haugesund.

Is there a third way?

The heritagisation processes at Haugesund reflect general trends where commemorations have become democratised, secularised, privatised, commercialised and contested in the local matrix, where “the role of the state has become more discreet, more a matter of instigation than of control” (Nora 1998 [1992]: 614). Taking this further, democratic plural uses of cultural heritage require a critical analysis of how memory is at work within the local matrix, not only on a national and international scale (Ashworth *et al.* 2007: 27). The example from Haugesund shows that the branding of Harald Fairhair and the Viking concept in general partake in commercialised regional struggles. In these struggles, aspects of exclusion/inclusion become evident by how competing regions brand their past and compete in being attractive for a visitor market. Today, regional administrative bodies have become a structuring condition for how the discipline of archaeology is practiced and how heritage is defined. The competitive character of regions and their claims of the past bring into question the role of national and international political frameworks in local heritage strategies, and thereby how academic research communities and the cultural heritage management sector maintains and serves local heritage projects and programs.

Is there a third way, an approach that goes beyond local and national heritage frameworks? In Haugesund, the romantic Viking approach seems to favour heroism, thus neglecting heritage issues associated with, for instance, atrocity. Haugesund has also more to offer for the public than just a romanticised Viking heritage. The most central question in the romantic commemoration practice about Harald Fairhair has been where he had his homeland in order to gain ownership of the story. The challenge for Haugesund is to keep in mind that the sunrise is not limited to a local horizon. Based on this argument, a cosmopolitan approach, a world citizenship perspective could be a valuable resource for people experiencing the heritage of Haugesund. Cosmopolitan heritage discourses are directed towards an expanded concept of identity, which includes a concept of the ‘others’ otherness (see Delanty 2012). It pertains to aspects of humankind or more supra-national considerations, as I understand the concept. I will illustrate this with an example.

In the 1870s, the left-wing politicians were against the idea that Parliament should participate in the funding of the construction of a Harald monument in 1872 (Krag 1999). They asked: Why should we celebrate a brutal conqueror's will to power? They continued rhetorically: Is this totalitarian act worth celebrating as representing parliamentary ideas and democracy? The history of and the memorial theme about Harald Fairhair extracts, in other words, a discussion about democracy and parliamentary ideals, and state processes founded on the political will to power by violence and military forces. This public theme is, however, not a priority in local exhibitions and commemoration practices in the area. Issues of citizenship and state formations could serve as a dialogic platform in local historic centres and other public forums, where the history and heritage of Harald Fairhair are disseminated for instance in the light of the 'Arab Spring' or similar processes of democratisation in other parts of the world which we as global citizens experience today.

Conclusion

In this article, the dynamics of heritage production were examined by emphasising how a popular and commercial past becomes the means for public debates and conflicts, thus questioning the function experts within the field of archaeology and cultural heritage management have in local communities. The memorial tradition in the Haugesund region in western Norway, which has taken place at archaeological sites associated with the Viking hero and the first king of Norway, Harald Fairhair, have been examined. The memorial tradition reveals a two-sided discursive content where a commercialised discourse based on local patriotism and romanticism is privileged, whereas an educational discourse based on cultural pluralism within a national and international interpretative framework is marginalised. The function of archaeologists and heritage management within these two discursive fields were discussed, and a third way based on a cosmopolitan heritage approach was proposed as an alternative way for how a Viking heritage could gain value in local societies.

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